

EPA Studies Ways to Cut Warming Pollution

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Government studies released Thursday show a broad range of potential costs if the United States were to regulate carbon dioxide to curb global warming, from relatively cheap to expensive.

The Environmental Protection Agency said its analyses show the superiority of President Bush's plan for cutting air pollution from the nation's 600 coal-burning power plants.

But Bush's plan, which wouldn't regulate carbon dioxide at all, has been stalled in Congress since its introduction in 2002. Nonetheless, EPA compared it with current regulations as well as competing legislative proposals by Sens. Tom Carper, D-Del., and James Jeffords, I-Vt.

None of the proposals is expected to come up for consideration until next year at the earliest.

Bush's plan would cost utilities \$3 billion to \$6 billion a year to cut nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide and mercury by 70 percent, EPA said, but would generate up to \$143 billion in health benefits by 2020. Nitrogen oxides cause smog, sulfur dioxide causes acid rain and mercury is a neurotoxin widely blamed for developmental disorders in some children because it gets into the food chain through fish.

The president rejected the 1997 Kyoto pact that requires industrial nations to reduce carbon dioxide, saying it would cost the U.S. economy \$400 billion and almost 5 million jobs.

The EPA analysis, however, put the cost at much less. Under the Carper scenario, the agency said, federal controls to reduce carbon dioxide would cost \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion by 2013. More stringent controls under the Jeffords approach would cost \$32 billion to \$54 billion by 2010, EPA said.

Dan Riedinger, a spokesman for the Edison Electric Institute, a utility trade group, said the "relatively inexpensive" costs of cutting carbon dioxide under Carper's bill would result from industry switching from coal to natural gas to cut mercury pollution.

EPA, however, said none of the plans would lead to much of a reduction in coal production, which has been a big worry, particularly among lawmakers from coal-producing states.

Carper's bill would cut 10 tons of mercury and 1.7 million tons of nitrogen oxides by 2013, and reduce 2.25 million tons of sulfur dioxide by 2016. It also would cut almost 2.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide by 2013. EPA estimated it would cost \$8 billion to \$10 billion a year, but generate up to \$161 billion a year in health benefits by 2020.

Jeffords' plan would cut 1.5 million tons of nitrogen oxides, 2.25 million tons of sulfur dioxide and 5 tons of mercury by 2010, and reduce 2 billion tons of carbon dioxide by 2010. It would cost \$41 billion to \$51 billion a year, but provide up to \$211 billion a year in health benefits by 2020, EPA said.

The study used 1999 figures to compare the three proposals and current regulations. Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, called the modeling helpful even though it made "unrealistic assumptions" that natural gas prices wouldn't soar.

EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson told reporters the study was the most comprehensive analysis of competing legislative proposals that the agency has ever done.

"I believe there is common ground among a number of the legislative proposals," he said. "Now we can have the most informed debate there's ever been."